

Dear Judge Traynor,

This Statement is to detail my life and the experiences that have made me into who I am today. I consider myself blessed to have been given so many wonderful memories and an amazing family to share them with. I have also experienced some challenges, but these have given me the opportunity to learn and grow. I am hopeful this statement will give you a view into my life.

I was born on April 30th, 1998 to my parents, Joseph Sr. and Charlene. This time was very difficult for my parents because I was born premature, weighing only 5 pounds 6 ounces at birth, leading to me being held in the NICU. When my parents were finally able to bring me home, feeding proved to be difficult. Breastmilk would be thrown up almost immediately and formula would give me an extremely upset stomach. The only milk I could drink was soy milk, which was expensive and, as my parents discovered later, can lead to hormonal imbalances. Clothing was also difficult to find because I was so small. My grandmother would buy doll clothes at rummage sales because only doll socks would fit me.

After giving birth, my mother returned to work too soon. Due to the extreme stress on her body, it started to shut down and she was rushed to the hospital.

The doctors were able to stabilize her, but she was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, a chronic nerve disease making movement painful. This diagnosis turned out to be a blessing in disguise. While my mother would be unable to work, she was able to spend the extra time with me at home. My father had to work hard and sometimes long hours to support us, but the time we had together was special.

When I became old enough for preschool, my parents decided to send me to St. Josephs Catholic School in Mandan. My mother and father grew up in Catholic homes and attended Catholic schools, so the choice was obvious for them. While I do not remember much from this time, I met my best friend Mason during this time. He would continue to be my best friend until the time of my arrest.

After preschool, my parents sent me to a kindergarten closer to home so my mother would be able to walk me to school when her Fibromyalgia allowed. While the school was good, I missed Mason and the layout of the school made it difficult for my mother to bring me to class so after graduation I was moved back to St. Josephs.

Finally reunited with Mason at St. Josephs, School became a joy for me. Being able to attend Mass with mom every week is one of my favorite memories.

Everyday at St. Josephs was wonderful and allowed me to flourish. Mason became more of a brother to me, and everyday was spent talking and every summer was spent bowling, swimming, and camping with each other. I have very fond memories from this time and I will cherish the time forever.

After graduation, Mason and I were sent to different schools. While I was nervous, I was excited to make new friends. This ended up being a very difficult time in my life. My classmates did not welcome me as I was coming from a different school.

Everyday was spent alone with the only time I enjoyed school being lunch. My weight grew, leading to more harassment from my classmates. The only way I knew to get away was to fake being sick so I could stay home. I talked to a nun at the school everyday, but she was only able to help me so much.

The bullying did not stop at school. I was cornered at a football game by my classmates and threatened with violence. They only allowed me to escape when I broke down in tears.

I began to use the internet as a way to find friends. I would instant message friends from Mason's school, hoping that I could find more friends. One day I recieved a message from a girl saying she had seen me at football practice and had gotten my name from a friend.

I loved the new friendship that was developing. She was incredibly kind when so many in my life were mean. Messaging online soon turned to texting, and not a day passed without us talking to each other. As the days passed, a romance developed and she said she would love to go to a movie. As the day arrived, I recieved numerous messages from her, calling me a loser and a reject. She said no one would ever love me and I would be better off killing myself. I later learned she was set up by a classmate to do this.

This event led me to the lowest point in my life. I began to watch porn and I was unable to trust anyone. If anyone showed me kindness, I thought they were setting me up. I feared any relationship with anyone other than my family.

Graduation could not come soon enough. After the misery of middle school, my parents sent me to St. Mary's highschool. I believe that God saw the pain in my heart and led me there. From the first day, I knew it would be different. I met friends who genuinely cared for me and loved me for who I was. I met another best friend, Devin, on my first day of school. Together, we created so many wonderful memories and he showed me how to trust again. God led me to Devin, and in him I found a wonderful friend. I truly believe that Devin and St. Marys saved my life.

Highschool was a wonderful time in my life, but it was far too short. As graduation approached I again feared moving to a new school with new people. I enrolled at NDSU so I could be near Mason, who studied in Wahpeton. My first year was difficult, but offered great lessons. Being away from my family was tough, but I found a major that I loved and my grades improved from high school. My mother studied Criminal Justice in college and I followed suit. I dedicated myself to my studies while also making new friends.

After my first year, I returned home for Summer vacation. My dad began to have knee problems and we learned knee surgery would be needed to correct the issue. My parents asked me to return home to help take care of dad and the home as my mom wouldn't be able to do it herself. While it was tough to move away from my friends I had made in Fargo, it was nice to be home and have the opportunity to help my parents. I finished my second year of study at BSC and enrolled at Minot State. It was difficult managing a full course load and taking care of dad, but the bonding we shared was special.

At Minot State, my love for Criminal Justice grew. I knew it was the right field for me and I wanted to make a difference.

I met many wonderful instructors who truly loved teaching and my dedication paid off. I graduated Cum Laude and began working at Missouri River Correctional Center within weeks of graduating.

Working as a Correctional Officer was an incredible experience, and knowing I had an impact on the lives of the residents was extremely rewarding. I even enrolled in the Contact Officer program, learning from Norwegian officers about their procedures and using them in my work to help residents achieve goals and resolve problems in hopes of reducing recidivism rates.

While working as a correctional officer, my pornography habits truly begin to turn into an addiction. Seeing my friends married and dating while I was alone made me feel the need for intimacy in my life. With my experience in middle school, I was unable to develop any relationship outside of a friendship with a woman. Anytime I would get close with a woman, I would turn away and shut myself off for fear of getting set up or hurt again. Pornography helped to fill this need and I began to watch it more often. While I would only watch it a few times in middle school, as time progressed I began to watch it two or three times a day every single day. I would rather stay home from a trip than not be able to watch pornography.

Pornography became a necessity instead of a source of pleasure. I would skip some trips and opportunities with family and friends because I wanted to watch pornography.

Looking back on this time, I wish I had sought help to take control of my struggles, but I believe God had a plan to help me when I wouldn't help myself.

June 29th, 2022 was the day my life changed forever. I was returning to work after having Covid and had to stay late for a contact officer meeting. Upon leaving I was followed by a police car and an unmarked car. I stopped to get food and was arrested. Disorientated and scared, the first call home from jail I asked my dad if I still had a father. I knew my life would change and I wanted to make good changes.

Being unable to watch pornography was extremely difficult. After being apart of my life for so long, I didn't know what to do without it. I had also lost contact with all my friends and felt like everywhere I went, I was being stared at and hated by everyone. After months of sheltering myself, my counselor helped me to open up. I started volunteering at a soup kitchen which helped immensely. Serving others and working towards a common good with other volunteers helped me to come out of my shell again.

I also took up bowling as a hobby to help make myself comfortable with being in public. I made good friendships with the workers and it became a spot I felt comfortable in.

My relationship with the Lord has also improved incredibly. Letting His word dictate my life has helped me to be a better friend, son, and person. Although I lost a lot after my arrest, I was able to build a life with Him at the center.

Finally, my relationship with my mom and dad has improved incredibly. Although I lived at home while I worked, I would never see them as I would prioritize the internet and video games over them. After my arrest, my family has grown much stronger. I work on woodworking projects, outdoor projects, and automotive projects with dad. My mom and I love cooking, doing puzzles, and watching bowling together. My relationship with them has never been stronger and we have grown so much as a family.

I am sorry for what I've done and I apologize to my friends, family, and coworkers for letting them down.

Joe Schlinger